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BROWNBACK COSPONSORS BILL TO LIFT AG SANCTIONS

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback today spoke at a news conference introducing bipartisan legislation he is cosponsoring, that would open markets for farmers hurt by unilateral food embargoes.

“This bill is a second chance for Congress to do the right thing and reform unilateral sanctions on food and medicine,” Brownback said. “The Senate spoke in strong support of unilateral sanctions reform just a few months ago on the agriculture appropriations bill. It is past time to take action and stop punishing American farmers. The USDA estimates that agricultural sanctions cost the U.S. \$1.2 billion per year.

“Using food and medicine as weapons – unilaterally, fails to take into account that the U.S. has competition in the agriculture industry. By denying U.S. products, the government does not have any leverage to change a foreign nation’s policy because other countries will eagerly sell. The only one who gets hurt in this process, is the U.S. producer.

“This bill would not eliminate the use of sanctions in necessary cases – but rather, would simply require that the president get Congressional approval for those sanctions that are deemed necessary for U.S. interests.

“Our ag economy is in peril now. Lifting sanctions is one sure way to empower U.S. producers and open agricultural markets. This is the very essence behind the Freedom to Farm bill,” Brownback said.

In August, the Senate voted 70-28 in favor of an amendment cosponsored by Brownback to lift unilateral sanctions on food and medicine. However, in the final conference report between the House and the Senate, the amendment was stripped.

The Food and Medicine for the World Act ends the power of the president to act alone in using food and medicine exports as a weapon of diplomacy. Under the bill, all current food and medicine embargoes would be lifted. The president would need Congressional approval to reimpose current embargoes and establish any new embargoes on food or medicine.

Other cosponsors of the legislation introduced by U.S. Sen. John Ashcroft include U.S. Sens. Byron Dorgan, Chuck Hagel, Christopher Dodd, Max Baucus, Pat Roberts, and Bob Kerrey.